

What is the meaning of "Fate", in the ancient use of the word?

What its popular signification now?

No language is so meagre, or so imperfect, as not to contain a term very nearly, if not exactly, synonymous with our word Fate. This proves the universality of the idea.

But men, in different ages and under different circumstances, have attributed to various causes the same or similar phenomena, though the works ^{of fate} have ever been the same, yet fate itself has undergone an almost infinite variety of modifications; hence we read that in old times a certain inexorable trio, called "Moirae", commencing with the raw material, spun out and finally severed the thread of human life, in these days of innovation one is compelled to do the work of three.

I have said that the idea was universal and though many deny that there is any such

thing as fate, and others differ in the views they take of it, yet we all have a sufficiently clear idea of what it is to write about it. To say about it, is not upon it. Some would at once reject the term, while others would modify its signification to adapt it to their own opinion.

There appear to have been those of every age and nation, who have risen above the sensual conceptions of the multitude— who, satisfied if they could search out the causes of things by the aid of the mental eye alone, have thus from time to time rescued small fragments of truth from the general wreck.

According to the belief of the mass of the Greeks, 3 sisters, Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos, presided over the destinies of men. They were acquainted with the past, the present, and the future, and are represented with spindles which they keep constantly in motion, spinning away the thread of human life, and singing the fate of mortals. The Romans had their Parcae and the Northerners their Nornen.

These Sisters were ²regarded either as independent powers—the originators as well as executors of certain inevitable, though not un-

mutable laws, or, as some supposed, were the daughters of Jupiter, and as such acted in obedience to his commands.

Plato's views appear to have been more correct. "All things," says he, "are in fate; i.e. within its sphere or scheme, but all things are not fated: it is not in fate that one man shall do so and so, and another suffer so and so, for that that would be the destruction of our free agency and liberty: but if any one should choose such a life, and do such or such things, then it is in fate that such or such consequences shall ensue upon it." That Socrates did not adopt the popular opinion is evident from those words of Cicero, "*esse divinum quoddam, quod Socrates demonium appellat, cui semper ipse paruerit, nunquam impellente, saepe revocante.*"

It is difficult to say whether, in the popular use of the word at the present day, any peculiar or even precise meaning is attached to the word "Fate"; many, however, employ it to signify the necessary and inevitable operations of certain fixed laws, which were originally imposed by the Deity. — This

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Definition, corresponds to what has been termed
Physical fate.

The ancients never lost sight of an invis-
ible agent or power, independent of the laws
of nature. — The point at issue among the
moderns is, whether the Deity fore-ordained or merely
fore-knew before the world was created, what
was to happen to his creatures. — Whether man
is a free agent. — and so on.

Such was "effatum," and is therefore unavoidable;
said the ancients.

Though fated, it was by no means unavoidable;
say we.

Whatever is "effatum" is fated; said they.
— Everything or nothing is fated, yet nothing
is "effatum;" say we.

Thoreau.